

CLAIMS

We claim:

1 1. A method for distributing purchasing incentives to retail customers,
2 comprising the following steps performed at a central site in cooperation with a
3 communication device at a customer site:

4 logging in a remotely located customer using identity data and region data
5 transmitted by the customer over a communication network;

6 transmitting over the communication network a plurality of incentive
7 offers to the registered customer, the incentive offers being exercisable in the customer's
8 region;

9 receiving incentive offer selection data from the customer over the
10 communication network, the offer selection data including the designation of a retailer
11 at which selected offer or offers may be exercised;

12 generating a purchasing incentive containing in encoded form the identity
13 of the retailer designated by the customer and the identity of the customer; and

14 transmitting at least one incentive to the customer over the communication
15 network, wherein the transmitted incentive is encoded with the identity of the retailer
16 selected by the customer.

1 2. A method as defined in claim 1, and further comprising the step of:
2 communicating with the customer concerning the use of other shopping
3 aids.

1 3. A method as defined in claim 2, wherein the step of communicating
2 with the customer includes:

3 transmitting a list of products available for purchase;

4 receiving customer selections from the list of products; and

5 transmitting a shopping list to the customer.

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6 4. A method as defined in claim 2, wherein the step of communicating
7 with the customer includes:
8 transmitting a list of recipes to the customer;
9 receiving customer selection of one or more recipes;
10 transmitting back to the customer a shopping list that includes ingredient
11 products needed in each selected recipe; and
12 transmitting to the customer at least one purchase incentive pertaining to
13 an ingredient product used in a selected recipe.

1 5. A method as defined in claim 1, wherein the step of transmitting a
2 plurality of incentive offers includes transmitting incentive offers from specific product
3 manufacturers.

1 6. A method as defined in claim 1, wherein the step of transmitting a
2 plurality of incentive offers includes transmitting incentive offers from specific retailers.

1 7. A method as defined in claim 1, wherein the step of generating a
2 purchase incentive includes:
3 converting textual and numeric information provided by the customer to
4 graphical form;
5 converting other textual and numeric information to graphical form; and
6 merging the converted information with other graphical information
7 defining the incentive, to form a composite graphical incentive image for transmission
8 to the customer.

1 8. A method as defined in claim 7, wherein the step of generating a
2 purchase incentive further includes:
3 generating a complex graphical background pattern for the incentive
4 image; and
5 merging the background information with the textual, numeric and other

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6 graphical information in the incentive image.

1 9. A method as defined in claim 1, wherein the step of transmitting at
2 least one incentive includes:

3 transmitting only an advisory message to the customer; and

4 transmitting the terms of the incentive directly to the retail store selected
5 by the customer, for use by the customer on a subsequent visit to the store.

6 10. A method as defined in claim 1, wherein the step of transmitting at
7 least one incentive includes:

8 transmitting only an incentive token to the customer; and

9 transmitting the terms of the incentive directly to the retail store selected
10 by the customer, for use by the customer, who brings the token to the store on a
11 subsequent visit.

1 11. A method for distributing purchasing incentives and other shopping
2 aids to customers over a communication network, the method comprising the steps of:

3 logging in as a customer by providing at least an individual identification,
4 a postal region code, and retail store selection;

5 transmitting from a central site and receiving at a remote customer site,
6 a plurality of incentive offers, each of which is exercisable only in the customer's postal
7 region;

8 selecting at the customer site one or more of the incentive offers and
9 transmitting these selections back to the central site;

10 generating at least one purchasing incentive containing in encoded form
11 the identity of the retail store selected by the customer and the identity of the customer;
12 and

13 transmitting the at least one incentive to the customer.

1 12. A method as defined in claim 11, and further comprising:

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2 in response to a customer's action, transmitting a shopping list to the
3 customer for selection of products;
4 receiving the customers selection of products on the shopping list; and
5 transmitting a customer-specific shopping list to the customer as a
6 shopping aid.

1 13. A method as defined in claim 11, and further comprising:
2 in response to a customer's action, transmitting a recipe list to the
3 customer for possible selection of a recipe;
4 receiving the customer's selection of one or more recipes; and
5 transmitting a complete recipe to the customer, including a list of
6 ingredients, and transmitting any purchasing incentives tied to ingredients of the recipe.

1 14. A method as defined in claim 11, wherein the step of transmitting a
2 plurality of incentive offers includes:
3 transmitting one set of incentive offers originating from product
4 manufacturers; and
5 transmitting another set of incentive offers originating from product
6 retailers.

1 15. A system for distributing purchasing incentives to retail customers,
2 comprising:
3 a communication network establishing two-way communication between
4 a central site and each of a plurality of customer devices;
5 a file at the central site containing a plurality of incentive offers;
6 a computer located at the central site, the computer including
7 means for storing customer information at the central site, based
8 on information transmitted from any of the customer devices to the central
9 site computer, over the communication network, the customer information
10 including geographical region data and identification data;

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means for retrieving incentive offers from the file of incentive offers, based on the customer's geographical region, and transmitting the retrieved offers to the customer over the communication network;

means for receiving customer selections made from the incentive offers transmitted to the customer, and for receiving a customer designation of a retailer at which the selected incentives are to be exercised;

means for generating at least one purchasing incentive containing in encoded form the identity of the retailer designated by the customer and the identity of the customer; and

means for transmitting the generated purchasing incentive to the customer over the communication network.

16. A system as defined in claim 15, wherein:

the system further comprises another file at the central site containing a list of products available for purchase; and

the computer at the central site further includes means, responsive to a customer request, for transmitting the list of products to the customer, receiving customer selections from the list, and transmitting a shopping list back to the customer.

17. A system as defined in claim 15, wherein:

the system further comprises another file at the central site containing a list of recipes available for customer use; and

the computer at the central site further includes means, responsive to a customer request, for transmitting the list of recipes to the customer, receiving customer selections from the list, and transmitting complete recipes back to the customer, together with an ingredients shopping list and any associated purchasing incentives.

18. A system as defined in claim 15, wherein the means for retrieving incentive offers and transmitting them to the customer includes:

a manufacturer offer file containing purchasing incentive offers currently

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23. A method for distributing purchasing incentives and other shopping aids to customers over a communication network, the method comprising the steps of:

1 27. A method as defined in claim 24, and further comprising the step of:
2 selecting consumers to receive at least one purchase incentive on the basis
3 of non-demographic factors such as frequency of usage of coupons and frequency of
4 usage of the online system.

1 28. A method for distributing purchasing incentives to retail customers,
2 comprising the steps of:
3 maintaining a consumer purchase history database derived in part from
4 accumulated purchase data of identifiable consumers;
5 obtaining personal information from a consumer;
6 establishing a personal page in a computer network, for any consumer who
7 requests one, based in part on the personal information obtained from the consumer,
8 wherein the personal page contains information about incentives directed specifically to
9 the consumer associated with the page;
10 maintaining a consumer personal database for each consumer having a
11 personal page, to store information contained in the personal page of the consumer;
12 generating purchase incentives for the consumer based in part on prior
13 purchasing behavior and on personal information known from the consumer's personal
14 database;
15 updating the personal page to include the generated purchase incentives;
16 and
17 transmitting an advisory message to the consumer concerning the updated
18 personal page.

1 29. A method for distributing purchasing incentives to retail customers,
2 comprising the steps of:
3 transmitting promotional materials pertaining to product discounts, to a
4 consumer's remote terminal;
5 displaying the promotional materials pertaining to product discounts at the
6 consumer's remote terminal;

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1 31. A method as defined in claim 29, wherein:
2 the step of generating a voucher generates a voucher that is redeemable
3 on a subsequent store visit.

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